

6

Export Certification
Manual

Special Procedures

Review Guidelines for Certificates

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Review Guidelines for Certificates

ECSs are responsible for reviewing certificates and for conducting field audits to ensure compliance with Federal regulations, policies and procedures, foreign import requirements, and USDA-APHIS-PPQ obligations to bilateral agreements, protocols, Memorandums of Understanding, and international standards.

These review guidelines are as provided in Section Four of the *ACO Quality Manual* and are provided here to help ECSs perform comprehensive reviews (under optimum operational conditions):

1. Ask supervisors of ACOs to review copies of issued certificates, on a weekly basis, when operationally feasible. Supervisors should note major mistakes and document corrective actions taken on the certificate copy or an attached sheet.
2. Review (at least monthly) 5 to 10 percent of the copies of issued certificates. If a particular issuing office historically has a high volume of issued certificates or has made frequent mistakes, then a more intensive or frequent review may be necessary.
3. Document **major mistakes**, which include but are **not** limited to the following examples:
 - A. Certification of a prohibited or ineligible product.
 - B. Certification of plants or plant products from non-approved fields or facilities or failure to include treatments on certificates.
 - C. Certification of CITES materials at a non-designated CITES port.
 - D. Failure to follow an established work plan or conditions prescribed in an import permit or other forms of official communication from a National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO).
 - E. Failure to consult EXCERPT or other export job aids.
 - F. Failure to inspect a shipment or to follow an established inspectional procedure.

- G.** Failure to sign certificates.
- H.** Issuance of an improper certificate.
 - I.** Missing, incomplete, or incorrect additional declaration (e.g., add an additional declaration not required by an import permit, export summary, or the ECM).
 - J.** Failure to fill in “Place” or “Place Issued” at the time prepaid certificates are purchased to ensure that prepaid certificates are issued by the correct office.
- 4.** Provide feedback to the issuing office and the State Plant Health Director (SPHD) who has statewide responsibility for export certification. If the issuing ACO is a State or county cooperator, the SPHD will forward the feedback to the State Plant Regulatory Official (SPRO). In turn, the SPRO will give the feedback to the ACO or the ACO’s supervisor (see [Figure 6-12-1 on page 6-12-4](#) for a model letter you can follow to document major mistakes. For a fillable version, click [here](#) **BAD LINK**.) Provide a copy of the certificate in question, backup documents, and a brief explanation.



To better facilitate local communications among ECSs, SPHDs, SPROs, and ACOs; ECSs may wish to contact the SPHD to establish or to confirm the proper protocol to follow when giving feedback to SPROs and ACOs who are cooperators.

- 5.** Discuss major mistakes among the ACO, the ACO’s supervisor, and SPHD to answer questions or concerns about the error and to prevent recurrences.
- 6.** Document the discussion and any recommended action for the ACO, the ACO’s supervisor, and SPHD. Forward a copy to the SPHD and Export Services for information.
- 7.** If an ACO continues to issue certificates with recurring mistakes consult with the SPHD and Regional Program Manager (who will notify Export Services) to consider suspending the ACO’s accreditation. To determine if the recurring mistakes are deliberate, the regional office will initiate an investigation by Investigative and Enforcement Services.
- 8.** USDA-APHIS-PPQ’s commitment to the ACO accreditation program is to consider suspension if an ACO makes three or more major mistakes during a 12-month period or if an ACO repeats the same major error during a 12-month period after being counseled.
- 9.** Note occasional mistakes that would **not** warrant formal documentation. Examples of occasional mistakes include the following:

- A.** Incorrect lining out of blocks
 - B.** Failure to complete all blocks
 - C.** Recorded incorrect approved country name
 - D.** Failure to date the certificate
 - E.** Misspelled words
 - F.** Recorded unclear abbreviations
- 10.** After completing the review process, either destroy the copies of the certificates or retain them for training purposes as follows:
- A.** Destroy copies by shredding and/or burning (appropriate methods); recycle the copies **only** if the confidentiality of the information can be maintained.
 - B.** If the copies are retained for training purposes protect the confidentiality of the information.

If a copy of a particular certificate is needed at a later date obtain a photocopy from the issuing office.

Special Procedures: Review Guidelines for Certificates
Review Guidelines for Certificates

Date: _____

To: _____

[insert name of State Plant Health Director or State Plant Regulatory Official]

Recently _____ certified _____ to _____
(insert name of Authorized Certification Official (ACO)) [name of product] [name of country]

on Phytosanitary Certificate # _____ (attached). This Federal plant export certificate has/has not been reported as rejected by the importing country. The error(s) is/are checked below:

- ☐ Failure to sign the Federal plant export certificate.
- ☐ Certification of a prohibited or ineligible plant or plant product.
- ☐ Failure to follow an established work plan or conditions prescribed in an import permit.
- ☐ Failure to consult Phytosanitary Notes or other export job aids.
- ☐ Missing, incomplete, or incorrect required additional declaration; or recorded an unnecessary addition declaration.
- ☐ Certification of commodities from a non-approved field or treatment facility or failure to include treatment marks on boxes or the Federal plant export certificate.
- ☐ Certification of CITES materials at a non-designated CITES port.
- ☐ Issuance of an improper certificate.
- ☐ Failure to inspect a shipment or to follow an established inspectional procedure.
- ☐ Other (noncompliance with established Federal regulations, policies, procedures, bilateral agreements, protocols, Memorandums of Understanding, and international standards):

Our records indicate that this is the ACO's _____ warning this year. Future errors could result in suspending the ACO's accreditation (authority to issue Federal plant export certificates). Please forward to my office a letter explaining the error(s) and what corrective actions will be taken. This notice is intended as a corrective action to ensure the integrity of USDA's phytosanitary export certification program.

If you have any questions, contact me at _____.
(insert your phone number)

_____, Export Certification Specialist
(Signature of Export Certification Specialist)

Enclosure

FIGURE 6-12-1: Model Letter for Documenting Major Mistakes Found on a certificate